Payoff

Because a business continuity plan affects all functional units within the organization, each functional unit must participate in plan development and implementation. This requires careful and thorough project planning. Methods of developing a business continuity plan are discussed in this article. In addition, the importance of maintenance and updating are stressed, and a sample plan outline is presented.

Problems Addressed

Corporate business continuity planning specifies the methodology, structure, discipline, and procedures needed to back up and recover functional units struck by a catastrophe. Therefore, every functional unit must accept responsibility for developing and implementing the business continuity plan, and the plan must have the total support of management.

Strategically, senior management must ensure the development of a policy stating that the company will recover from any type of outage. Such recovery requires high-level commitment to the policy from all levels of management. Tactically, however, middle management implements the policy and the plan and is responsible for the daily operation of the plan. For management and the functional units to participate, they must have a comprehensive methodology to guide them in their actions and activities. This article discusses methods of developing a corporate business continuity plan.

Project Planning

There are numerous reasons for developing a total business continuity plan. Some of the most compelling are legal and regulatory requirements. Consideration must be given to the following when developing the plan:

- Are there any federal statutes or regulations applicable to the business which would apply to disasters relating to the business?
- Are there any state statutes or regulations applicable to the business which would apply to disasters relating to the business?
- What contract requirements (e.g., labor contracts, insurance agreements, mortgages, loans, or other financial documents) should be addressed by the plan?
- Are there any common-law considerations, such as claims against directors and officers raised by shareholders and others? Could there be negligence claims against the company for property damage or injuries to customers or business visitors?

Before beginning development of the business continuity plan, management should identify a business continuity project team. The project team is responsible for developing the business continuity plan and designing procedures and reporting techniques to support overall project management. In addition, the project team should identify individuals from senior management to review and approve the work performed by the project team.

Although the makeup of the project team will vary among companies, the following departments should be represented on the team:
Real estate and facilities.

Security.

Human resources.

Information systems.

Communications.

Technology, planning, and development.

Additional departments may also be represented. A business continuity manager should be delegated for the team.

**Developing the Plan**

The plan that is developed must ensure that any disaster will have a minimum impact on the company. The plan should address the company’s reasons for establishing the plan, the functional area of the company’s business that the plan will cover, and what staff or materials are in place or should be in place for the plan to function. The following sections discuss the requirements of the business continuity plan, the various elements of the plan, and the scope of the plan.

**Plan Requirements**

Although most plans address the need to continue data processing operations and to support critical operations during a crisis, most plans fail to consider loss of other functional units within the organization. Data processing generally initiates the need for disaster recovery planning; however, it is now recognized that recovering data centers alone cannot ensure the continuing health of the organization. Companies must address corporate division and department business continuity planning as well. In fact, planning should be done for all essential functional units of the organization.

The plan must be comprehensive; it must deal with the broadest range of disasters possible. There should be a basic plan with additional procedures for specific hazards (e.g., earthquakes, fires, or exposure to hazardous materials). The plan should preserve the integrity of the business, not individual items or goals.

The plan must contain sufficient detail so that its users will know what procedures to follow, how to perform these activities, and the resources that will be available. The plan should contain action steps that have been decided on and agreed to in advance. Both the response to the immediate disaster and the recovery and continuance of business operations and functions must be specified.

The plan must be owned by the organization. Key personnel must participate in identifying priorities, determining alternative strategies, negotiating agreements, and assembling necessary materials. The plan should be reviewed on a periodic basis or when circumstances change. It should be periodically tested with a defined testing program to ensure that it remains effective and up to date.

**Plan Elements**

The plan itself has five major elements:

- Risk and Business Impact Analysis.
Alternative analysis.

Response and recovery planning and plan documentation.

Plan publication and testing.

Training and implementation.

These are discussed in the following sections

Risk and Business Impact Analysis.

Before the plan is written, the hazards that may affect the company's facilities must be identified and their potential impact determined. It is also necessary to identify and rank the major business functions and the resources necessary to out those functions, and to identify the potential impact of the hazards on the critical business functions and operations. This helps determine the maximum allowable downtime for individual business functions and operations. From there, the minimum resource and personnel needs and time frames in which they will be needed can be identified. Finally, consideration of emergency operating procedures and strategies can begin.

Alternative Analysis.

Using the risk and business impact analysis as a base, consideration is given to the internal and external alternatives available for continuation of each function within the necessary time frames. These alternatives should be chosen on the basis of their cost, benefits, and feasibility. The alternatives considered should include not only those that are currently available but those that can be developed.

Response and Recovery Planning and Plan Documentation.

This involves the development and documentation of the procedures to be used to activate the plan (by declaration or event), move specific functions to the alternative or backup facility, maintain operations at that site while the primary site is being restored or a new permanent site prepared, and return operations to the primary site or another permanent location. The plan must identify ways to procure alternative resources to carry out business activities; determine responsibilities and notification procedures for the company, vendors, customers, and others; and detail recovery strategies and responsibilities.

Plan Publication and Testing.

The plan must be reviewed and agreed to by senior management and all departments. It must then be documented and distributed to key personnel with additional copies secured off site. Individual sections of the plan should be distributed to those who will be involved with its activation and operation.

The plan should contain a schedule for periodic review and updating. The only way to assess the adequacy of the plan before a disaster occurs is with a program of periodic tests. The tests used will vary from conceptual walkthroughs to actual relocation of specific departments or business functions.
Training and Implementation.

Employees should understand what is expected of them in a disaster and what their roles will be in the recovery process. This is achieved with a training and education program, which should be conducted before the plan is implemented.

The Scope of the Plan

All key personnel should be identified in the business continuity plan and given specific assignments. Common terminology should be defined in the plan document to avoid confusion at the time the plan is put into effect. In addition, the plan should interface with the IS disaster recovery plan. Budgets should be prepared for the initial costs of developing the plan and for the costs of maintaining the plan.

The scope of the business continuity plan should include the features discussed in the following sections.

A Vital Records Program.

The plan should help establish an information valuation program to determine which records should be retained and for how long. In addition, there should be a methodology for ensuring that critical records are retained off site.

Security Requirements.

The plan defines what security measures must be in place in the event of a disaster and what security measures are necessary for an off-site location. It also states who has access to each location.

Accounting Procedures.

Procedures must be put in place to facilitate the acquisition of needed replacement parts and to properly account for the costs of recovery. This in turn facilitates the filing of insurance claims, among other benefits.

Insurance Requirements.

The plan should define what insurance claims must be filed and give guidelines on working with risk managers to file a claim. One of the benefits of developing the business continuity plan is that insurance requirements are specifically defined.

Interdepartmental Interfaces.

Interfaces between divisions and departments must be defined in the business continuity plan.

Backup, Recovery, and Restoration Strategies.

All critical data, files, and documents should be backed up and stored off site. Recovery procedures should be documented in the business continuity plan, defining the steps necessary to recover the information that was lost. Restoration may require recreating the lost data, files, or documents rather than recovering with a backup. Procedures for such restoration must be documented.
Plan Maintenance and Testing.

Once implemented, the plan must be tested regularly to ensure that it is up-to-date. The plan should include a maintenance and testing schedule as well as a methodology for testing the plan to ensure that it is operating as expected.

Identifying Critical Resources

Not all activities within an organization are critical at the time of a catastrophe. The management disaster decision team identifies those operations that it deems critical to the organization. This determination is based on several specific factors, including the time at which the disaster occurs, legal and regulatory requirements, the amount of time that availability is lost, the company's public image, loss of market share, loss of revenue, the type of service loss (e.g., administrative, executive, or financial), and deadline requirements.

In addition, the plan should account for the facilities, equipment, materials, and supplies needed to adequately perform required tasks. Voice and data communications are particularly critical and should be given proper consideration.

For example, personnel are vital to the success of the recovery, and their comfort and support should be given special attention. Supplies and forms should be maintained off-site so that a supply is readily available in times of emergency. In addition, transportation can easily be disrupted in times of emergency, and transportation to an off-site location may not be readily available. Therefore, transportation to the main site or an off-site location must be planned if employees are to arrive at the designated stations in a timely manner.

Spare parts and units for power and environmental systems (e.g., air conditioners, fans, and heaters) should be available at the central business location. The engineering staff should have spare parts on hand for replacing broken parts. A backup unit should be available to replace the disabled units. When that is not possible or when the outage is outside the control of the company (e.g., the loss of a telephone company's Central Office or a power company's power station), the company must be prepared to move to its off-site location.

A vital record is any document that is necessary to ensure the survival of the business. To ensure the preservation and availability of vital records, all corporate documents should be classified as to their importance (e.g., essential, valuable, important, or nonessential). Corporate recordkeeping policies as well as retention requirements based on legal or regulatory requirements should be documented. The source document should be controlled and protected. In addition, there should be backup procedures for the documents, and a copy of them should be maintained at the off-site location.

Documentation, policies, procedures, and standards should be available in hard copy and should be accessible in both main and off-site locations. A disaster recovery plan has no value if the disaster recovery team cannot locate a copy of it.

Organizing the Project

The business continuity plan should be prefaced with a mission statement or purpose. This can be incorporated into the introductory section of the plan. All departments and functions involved in the project must understand the need for the plan, agree to participate in its implementation, and be committed to enforcing the plan.

The departments and functions that participate in the project vary among companies. In most companies, however, senior management must be kept up to date and is responsible for making most key decisions. The audit department oversees the entire process, ensuring that controls are enforced. When a disaster strikes, the building and facilities staff determine any losses and necessary repairs, and the public relations and marketing staffs
The human resources department is usually responsible for keeping all employees informed during and after a disaster, particularly in union shops. In addition, this staff often serves as the go-between for employees and management.

When it is necessary to replace equipment or parts, the purchasing department acquires the necessary components at the best possible price, and the financial or accounting department controls costs and purchases. The engineering department ensures that the components are properly ordered and installed.

At some level, all disasters have an impact on data processing. Therefore, the IS department must be kept up-to-date and should participate in the recovery procedures. The operations department ensures that the company continues to run as smoothly as possible.

Depending on the company’s business, the following departments might also be included in the business continuity planning process:

- Manufacturing.
- Research and development.
- Warehouse and distribution.
- Customer service.
- Field support services.

Representatives from these business areas can identify the functional, management, and support operations of the company in the initial phases of the project, while gathering information for the plan. As a result, critical divisions and departments that support the organization in times of catastrophe are identified.

In any company, the business continuity plan cannot be developed without the commitment and assistance of management and departmental staff. A considerable amount of coordination is also required, both within the company and between any external resources or consultants and company personnel. To facilitate this, it is recommended that different planning teams and functions be created. The size, number, and type of teams used are determined by the size of the company and by the computing environment. The following are various options, ranging from senior-level management teams on down:

- **The management decision-making team.** This team consists of senior management. It is responsible for making major decisions about the continuity plan and about whether or not to move off site after a disaster.

- **The business continuity steering committee.** This committee provides overall management of the project. It establishes and controls policies, standards, and procedures, and it defines the organization of the departments and other participants to ensure cohesive planning groups. This committee should include members of operations, IS, and finance. The actual composition of the team can be agreed on at the initiation of the project.

- **The business continuity planning coordinator.** This individual provides day-to-day coordination of the project and typically works with external resources or consultants. This person must be able to commit sufficient time to the project to ensure that it is completed within the agreed time frame.
- **The management operations team.** This team consists of line managers who are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations after a disaster occurs. They advise the management decision-making team and report decisions down through their respective areas.

- **Department coordinators.** These individuals are responsible for providing information on their department's operations, completing forms, and developing draft plans. Related departments can be grouped under one coordinator; other departments may have their own individual coordinators. The time required of these individuals increases with each phase of plan development.

- **The emergency operations team.** This team consists of those people who are responsible for ensuring that operations keep running in the off-site environment.

- **The damage assessment and postinvestigation team.** This team is responsible for evaluating damages to the facility and determining the cost to restore operations. It should consist of those people in charge of facilities and operations.

- **The reconstruction team.** This team consists primarily of facilities personnel. It is responsible for managing restoration activities.

It is recommended that at least a business continuity steering committee, a business continuity planning coordinator, and department coordinators be appointed.

It is important that departmental employees involved in developing the plan for their departments be aware of the reasons for developing the plan, the project organization, what is expected of them during the project, and the tools and information that will be provided to assist them in their work. This can be achieved by holding one or more group business continuity training meetings to discuss these points. During these meetings, any software that will be used should be demonstrated and all questionnaires and forms to be used in developing the plan should be explained in detail.

The following sections discuss the responsibilities of the various teams that may be involved in business continuity planning.

### The Disaster Decision-Making Team

The disaster decision-making team is primarily responsible for notifying the board of directors, regulatory bodies, regional companies, local companies, international bodies, and the media as required. This team may make these notifications itself or delegate the work.

In addition, members of this team make the final business decisions regarding whether the plan should go into effect, whether to move operations to the off-site location or continue business at the main site, and even whether to continue conducting business at all. Should the plan be put into effect, the team is kept up to date through management operations teams, the business continuity coordinator, and those functional areas reporting to the team that are in charge of handling areas of the disaster.

All recovery activities are submitted to this team for review; however, all disaster containment activities are handled on site as the events take place. Steps taken to contain the disaster are reported back to this team through the management operations team, as they occur if possible or after the fact if not. All major decisions regarding expenditures of funds are made by this team.
The Business Continuity Steering Committee and Planning Coordinator

The business continuity steering committee is responsible for establishing and controlling policies, standards, and procedures and for defining the structure of the project to ensure that the departments and other participants work together cohesively. In addition, the committee reviews, approves, and coordinates the plans developed by the participating groups.

In the event of a disaster, this committee serves as a facilitator, responsible for providing transportation to the backup facilities, if required; notifying affected personnel and families of the status of the disaster; providing cash for needed travel or emergency items; securing the affected areas, the business resumption control center, and the backup site; escorting personnel, if necessary; and presenting a carefully formatted release to the media and affected personnel as to the status of operations and personnel. Several areas are represented on the business continuity steering committee during the disaster, to ensure that basic necessities are made available to support those individuals working to recover the business.

The size of the business continuity steering committee depends on the extent of the disaster and the recovery needs. The following departments should be consulted in forming the committee:

- Purchasing.
- Human resources.
- Communications.
- Auditing.
- Finance and accounting.
- Transportation and amenities.
- Facilities.
- Security.
- Public relations.
- Risk management and insurance.
- Administrative services.
- Operations.
- Information systems.

The business continuity planning coordinator interfaces with the business continuity steering committee to ensure a smooth and successful transition to each phase of the plan. In addition, the coordinator acts as team manager for the management operations team, discussed in the following section.
The Management Operations Team

The management operations team is responsible for coordinating all emergency operations teams. When management decides that the business continuity plan is to be implemented, these team members (or their alternates) contact the emergency operations team members to advise them of the disaster declaration. They then report to the business resumption control center to begin damage assessment. Once at the disaster site, the management operations team monitors the emergency operations team's progress and acts as overall manager for all emergency operations teams activated by the operational group.

The management operations team forwards all requests for space, equipment, supplies, and additional human resources support to the department coordinator. The team members report daily on the status of all emergency operations to the business resumption coordinator for the management operations team.

The management operations team is primarily responsible for determining the extent of the disaster, relocating at the business resumption control center, and notifying emergency operations team managers and department coordinators. In addition, the team monitors recovery progress, and compliance with the business resumption plan during recovery and reports on recovery status to the business resumption coordinator, who in turn reports to the company president as required.

The Department Coordinators Team

The department coordinators team is composed of members from all functional areas. Each department coordinator acts as chairperson for his or her department's emergency operations team. In addition, the department coordinator manages the management disaster decision team and the business continuity steering committee. He or she communicates all of the department's needs and the department's status.

Department coordinators have access to the business resumption control center and attend strategic planning meetings. When a disaster occurs, they contact all emergency operations team managers and coordinate recovery efforts. Department coordinators submit written requests for equipment or supplies as soon as needs are made known to the business continuity steering committee.

Perhaps most important, the department coordinators monitor recovery operations. In this capacity, they receive and communicate status reports, receive daily reports from all emergency operations team managers, request additional human resources support as necessary, and maintain a log of the department's status and progress. In addition, the department coordinators communicate all decisions made by the management disaster decision team to affected managers within the department.

The Emergency Operations Team

The members of the emergency operations team are responsible for the smooth transition to the prearranged emergency backup center, continued operations, emergency procedures, notification of users, requisition of equipment and supplies, and a return to normal processing. Each member of the team should designate an alternate in case the primary team member is unavailable when a disaster occurs.

The size of the emergency operations team depends on the extent of the disaster and operating needs. The responsibilities of the team members include forwarding requests to the business continuity steering committee for transportation to the alternative facilities, if required, and for notification of key employees, affected families, and any employees who were off duty at the time of the disaster. In addition, the emergency operations team makes requests for firstaid, supplies, mail or courier service, replacement software or equipment, temporary workers, additional security or communications measures, backup power, and
documentation. Team members also work with the data processing operations and communications departments.

Each emergency operations team has a team manager and a backup manager, who report to the department coordinator. The team manager is responsible for coordinating the recovery effort. The managers participate in the damage assessment meeting to determine the extent of the damage. The manager gives daily status reports regarding recovery and ongoing operations to the business resumption coordinator.

**The Damage Assessment and Postinvestigation Team**

The damage assessment team reports directly to the management operations team and notifies it of the extent of damage. After damages have been assessed, this team functions as a postinvestigation team to determine the cause of the disaster. In some cases, the cause is obvious (e.g., an earthquake), but in many cases it is not. For example, in the case of a fire, the origin of the fire must be determined as well as how to prevent such a fire from happening again.

**The Reconstruction Team**

The reconstruction team is composed of those departments required to restore the damaged site. It should include all departments associated with building services as well as representatives from the damaged areas.

The reconstruction team's responsibilities include both temporary and long-term reconstruction efforts. From the initial damage assessment to final reconstruction of the damaged area, the reconstruction team directs and coordinates efforts to bring about a smooth, efficient reconstruction of the damaged areas.

**Preparing the Plan**

In preparing the plan, members of the business continuity project team must assemble documentation about their specific functional area and operating environment. In addition, they must identify critical performance requirements and rank the tasks within their jobs according to priority.

Departments they rely heavily on computer processing must explain in detail how their operations interface with each other and are supported by data processing. The needed information can be gathered from:

- Organizational charts.
- Job descriptions.
- Procedures manuals.
- Technical support requirements.
- Existing disaster recovery or business continuity plans.
- Risk analyses.
- Business impact analyses.
- Vulnerability assessments.
Questionnaires can be used successfully to gather information that can provide a foundation for the strategies that must be developed in the planning process. Although questionnaires should be customized for individual projects, they should always provide the basic information presented in Exhibit 1.

**Checklist of Basic Information Required on Business Continuity Planning Questionnaires**

- Description of departmental operations.
- Functions that support those operations.
- Peak operating times.
- Impact of department downtime.
- Recovery priorities and time frames for departmental functions.
- Staffing requirements under normal circumstances and in an emergency.
- Computer support for both departmental operations and individual functions. (This should cover both centralized and decentralized computer operations).
- Site requirements for both normal and emergency operations.
- Equipment needed (and the vendors of that equipment).
- Office and other supplies (and the vendors).
- Critical records needed and their backup and recovery requirements.
- Priority ranking of departmental functions.
- Name and address of alternative-site vendor.
- List of responsibilities and home telephone numbers of key personnel.
- Emergency telephone numbers (e.g., fire and police departments).
- Critical forms (number, names, and average use).
- Special equipment specifications.
- Area user list.
- Vendor backup contracts.
- Critical functions and assumptions (e.g., individuals might assume that they will have access to backup files).
- Minimum equipment and space requirements.

Departments should be asked to complete the questionnaire after the initial training meeting. The completed form should be returned to the department coordinator and any external consultants for review. The department coordinator and external consultants should review the answers with the department manager and the employee who completed the form to clarify, amend, and confirm the information.

The completed questionnaires should be compared to determine the priority of departmental functions, the impact relative to specific time frames, and the minimum resources needed to maintain the company's critical functions. This information is helpful when considering alternative or backup sites that will be needed.

All of the information obtained in these early phases of plan development is integrated into the business continuity plan. Plan development is designed to integrate or provide interfaces between sections of the data processing plan and the corporate business continuity plan. In addition, the plan incorporates any emergency procedures and provides references to any applicable sections of existing data center and departmental standards and procedures manuals.

The prompt recovery of an organization's corporate and functional operations from a loss of capability depends on the availability of a broad spectrum of resources. The procedures necessary to restore operations—initially in temporary facilities and later in the original or another permanent location—are detailed in the plan.

Each of the functional units prepares its plan on the basis of the outline provided by the plan coordinators (see the sample outline provided in Exhibit 2). The outline can be modified to suit the needs of the individual units. Although the plan discussed in this
section addresses disaster backup and recovery from a worst-case scenario, less severe or even short-term interruptions can also be planned for by using subsets of the overall plan.

Sample Outline of Business Continuity Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| I. Introduction | a. Executive overview or summary  
b. Organizational overview  
c. Minimum requirements  
d. General categories of disasters and contingencies |
| II. Responsibilities of the Disaster Decision-Making Team | |
| III. Responsibilities of the Business Continuity Coordinator and the Business Continuity Steering Committee | |
| IV. Responsibilities of the Management Operations Team | |
| V. Responsibilities of the Department Coordinators Team | |
| VI. Responsibilities of the Emergency Operations Team | |
| VII. Responsibilities of the Damage Assessment and Postinvestigation Team | |
| VIII. Responsibilities of the Reconstruction Team | |
| IX. General Issues | a. Awareness of critical events  
b. Notification of relevant persons  
c. Diagnosis of the cause, severity, and expected duration of the event  
d. Coordination of emergency response  
e. Communications  
f. Investigation and analysis of the event |
| X. The Corporate Recovery Plan (corporatwide outage)* | a. Organization and staffing  
b. Arrangements with vendors, contractors, and other organizations  
c. Backup and recovery plans  
  1. Information and communications systems  
  2. Hardware  
  3. Site  
  4. Location of business resumption control center |
| XI. The Operational Area Recovery Plan (based on functional areas) | a. Responsibilities of the backup operations team  
b. Responsibilities of the emergency operations team  
c. Responsibilities of the reconstructions team  
d. General issues  
e. Priority ranking of functions  
f. Name and address of alternative-site vendor  
g. List of responsibilities and home telephone numbers of key personnel  
h. Emergency telephone numbers (e.g., fire and police departments)  
i. Critical forms (number, names, and average use)  
j. Special equipment specifications  
k. Area user list (ranked according to priority)  
l. Copy of vendor backup contract  
m. Critical functions and assumptions (e.g., individuals may assume that they will have access to backup files)  
n. Minimum equipment and space requirements  
o. Appendixes (Same as Section XV) |
| XII. Emergency Notification | a. General categories of disasters and contingencies  
b. Immediate evacuation  
c. Fire emergency procedures  
d. Telephone bomb threat procedures  
  1. Bomb search procedures  
  2. General alert for bomb threats  
e. Medical emergencies  
f. Civil disorder  
g. Severe weather or threat of a natural disaster  
h. Extortion and terrorist threats  
i. Building and equipment emergencies (e.g., loss of power)  
j. Notification  
  1. Company closings for a disaster  
  2. Activating the business resumption control center  
  3. Access control procedures  
k. Company closings for early release of employees (e.g., because of an impending storm)  
  1. Major milestones in the notification process  
  2. Backup sites |
| XIII Testing the Business Continuity Plan | |

*The Corporate Recovery Plan includes the following sections:

  a. Organization and staffing
  b. Arrangements with vendors, contractors, and other organizations
  c. Backup and recovery plans
    1. Information and communications systems
    2. Hardware
    3. Site
    4. Location of business resumption control center

*The Operational Area Recovery Plan includes the following sections:

  a. Responsibilities of the backup operations team
  b. Responsibilities of the emergency operations team
  c. Responsibilities of the reconstructions team
  d. General issues
  e. Priority ranking of functions
  f. Name and address of alternative-site vendor
  g. List of responsibilities and home telephone numbers of key personnel
  h. Emergency telephone numbers (e.g., fire and police departments)
  i. Critical forms (number, names, and average use)
  j. Special equipment specifications
  k. Area user list (ranked according to priority)
  l. Copy of vendor backup contract
  m. Critical functions and assumptions (e.g., individuals may assume that they will have access to backup files)
  n. Minimum equipment and space requirements
  o. Appendixes (Same as Section XV)

*XII. Emergency Notification includes the following sections:

  a. General categories of disasters and contingencies
  b. Immediate evacuation
  c. Fire emergency procedures
  d. Telephone bomb threat procedures
    1. Bomb search procedures
    2. General alert for bomb threats
  e. Medical emergencies
  f. Civil disorder
  g. Severe weather or threat of a natural disaster
  h. Extortion and terrorist threats
  i. Building and equipment emergencies (e.g., loss of power)
  j. Notification
    1. Company closings for a disaster
    2. Activating the business resumption control center
    3. Access control procedures
  k. Company closings for early release of employees (e.g., because of an impending storm)
    1. Major milestones in the notification process
    2. Backup sites

*XIII Testing the Business Continuity Plan includes the following sections:
Business Continuity Planning Software

Several contingency planning and risk analysis software packages are currently on the market. It is not practical to list and evaluate them because that list is constantly changing. However, there are certain criteria that should be used during the software package selection process.

For example, ease of use and the number of installations or users are important when the company is selecting any software package, as are the frequency and availability of updates, the quality of documentation and vendor support, the reputation of the vendor, and the amount of training the vendor provides. The usability of output should also be considered. Specific to contingency planning, the software should be evaluated in terms of whether it provides total business continuity planning assistance or simply data center recovery.

Recommended Course of Action

For each company, the business continuity plan should cover all types of disaster situations. Procedures should be focused on getting the system running again within an acceptable time frame. The cause of the downtime is not important except in cases of regional disasters (e.g., earthquakes) or such specific hazards as a toxic spill. Special procedures should be included in the plan for these types of disasters.

The recovery strategies and procedures should be organized according to business functions. Strategies and procedures should be sufficiently detailed to enable company personnel to understand what is expected of them and how they should complete their responsibilities. However, strategies and procedures should be sufficiently flexible to permit changes should circumstances warrant them. Procedures should cover the maintenance of critical functions in an emergency mode as well as restoration of the primary facility or relocation to another permanent location.

The plan must specify the priority of recovery activities. It is impractical to determine during an emergency the order in which recovery procedures are to be conducted.

Personnel from the departments covered by the plan should be involved in its development from the start. These departments will be the users of the plan and therefore should play an integral part in its development.

The plan should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis; a plan is only as effective as its maintenance and updating program. Changes in departmental or company operations can quickly render a plan obsolete. A thorough maintenance and updating program prevents this.

Development of a business continuity plan may seem like a long and tedious process with no immediate benefit to the company. However, over the long term, a well-developed and well-maintained plan can help ensure that the company stays in business when a disaster strikes.

Author Biographies

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Sally Meglathery is director of EDP audit for the New York Stock Exchange, with responsibility for business resumption planning. Previously, she was a manager at Coopers & Lybrand, with responsibilities for consulting with clients on contingency planning, data security, and EDP auditing. Meglathery is a past president of the Information Systems Security Association (ISSA) and the International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium (ISC2). She is on the certification board for the Disaster Recovery Institute, which developed the Certified Disaster Recovery Planner.